



## STORIES of HOPE

### KENYA



Students from the Machakos School for the Deaf participate in an HIV/AIDS awareness march.

*The PEPFAR-supported program combines sign language skills, drama and visual communication to disseminate HIV/AIDS messages about abstinence and faithfulness to deaf students.*



#### Teaching HIV Prevention Through Sign Language

“HIV disease is characterized by a deterioration of immune function. ... Crucial immune cells are disabled and killed. ... HIV causes AIDS. ... HIV disrupts a person’s immune response, impairing the ability to fight other infections.” Imagine explaining this to a deaf child in a small town 40 miles outside of Nairobi, Kenya.

According to Ruth Mutua, a retired deaf education teacher and consultant, deaf members of the community suffer from stigma, which can be compounded by HIV/AIDS.

With support from the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (Emergency Plan/PEPFAR), 11 Peace Corps Volunteers are working with Kenya’s Deaf Education Program to teach hearing impaired students about HIV/AIDS. For volunteer Karen Pierce, teaching deaf students between the ages of 13 and 20 about HIV/AIDS and HIV prevention has been a challenging but fruitful task.

At the Machakos School for the Deaf, “Deaf students now seem more curious and open about sexuality and its relationship to HIV/AIDS. ... They have the information on HIV/AIDS. It’s in their books. They see it on the chalkboard. ... What they need now is to visualize it,” Karen said. “I recognize that use of improved sign language; visual aids such as video material and posters; and persuasive communication does [sic] positively impact communication with this population.”

Mutua concurs that the program adds a sense of normality to the lives of people with hearing disabilities, especially those living with HIV. It provides community members with hope for the future.

The PEPFAR-supported program combines sign language skills, drama and visual communication to disseminate HIV/AIDS messages about abstinence and faithfulness to deaf students. By the end of 2006, an estimated 1,100 deaf students and more than 100 teachers and caregivers for the deaf will have benefited from the program.

#### The U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

Department of State | U.S. Agency for International Development | Department of Defense | Department of Commerce  
Department of Labor | Department of Health and Human Services | Peace Corps

Office of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator  
[www.PEPFAR.gov](http://www.PEPFAR.gov) | [SGAC\\_Public\\_Affairs@state.gov](mailto:SGAC_Public_Affairs@state.gov)